

Open-source software: pros and cons
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The use of open source software has grown rapidly in the last years, and the studies indicate that its use grows rapidly /1, 2, 3, 4/. OSS is widely used in many domains, including libraries. However, many libraries (especially those in developing countries) are unaware of the options provided by OSS and so are looking to commercial vendors for support. Just several years ago, few people had heard the terms “open source software”. Those who had heard it incorrectly believed it to be exclusively the domain of programmers and technical people. Today this perception has changed. OSS has rapidly shifted from a model driven purely by the developer community and university support to one where a main driver is industry. Not only has open source spawned a thriving environment of small focused businesses, typically devoted to development and support of specific products or to maintenance and integration activities, it has also reshaped the business models and affected the strategies of large firms, including such major industrial players as IBM, Oracle, Philips, Nokia and SAP /5/. The true value of open source software is recognized through numerous projects where OSS is used to provide affordable community access points, build new business initiatives and develop computer literacy. OSS is one of the best examples of open, collaborative, internationally distributed production and development that exists today, and has generated tremendous interest around the world from government, policy, business, academic, research and developer communities. In a report into business deployments of open source software, a group of academics commissioned by the EC said that in “almost all cases” savings would be made by switching from proprietary to open source software /5/. The bold findings come in stark contrast to assertions by Microsoft /6/, that Linux savings are a myth. The European Parliament has also voted resolution A5-0264/2001 that “Calls on the Commission and Member States to promote software projects whose source text is made public (open-source software), as this is the only way of guaranteeing that no backdoors are built into programmes”.

During this workshop we will try to answer to the several questions:

1. What is OSS/FOSS/FLOSS (Free/Libre and Open Source Software)?
OSS definition and licence models will be presented.

2. Why to use OSS?
Billions are spent each year on licence fees for proprietary software for government, education, culture, business and other uses. A report published by the European Commission is encouraging EU governments to share open source software resources as a way to cut down on e-government costs.
High-quality OSS exists for almost any need.
Is it necessary to pay the high price for proprietary software...?

3. How to migrate to OSS?
Migration to OSS is not a trivial task for organizations were proprietary models are largely in use. At the IDABC site (Interoperable Delivery of European eGovernment Services to public Administrations, Businesses and Citizens) workshop participants can find “The IDA Open Source Migration Guidelines” /7/, which have been designed to help public administrators decide whether a migration to OSS should be undertaken.
Workshop participants will introduce their own vision and experience on migration scenarios.
“NGO-in-a-Box” of Tactical Technology Collective will be introduced as a possible model.

4. Where to get OSS products?

Almost two-thirds of OSS software is still written by individuals; firms contribute about 15% and other institutions another 20%. Europe is the leading region in terms of globally collaborating OSS software developers, and leads in terms of global project leaders, followed closely by North America /5/.

The world's largest development and download repositories of Open Source code and applications, with more than 100,000 open source projects listed, could be found at:

<http://sourceforge.net/>

<http://www.codehaus.org/>

<http://www.tigris.org/>

<http://www.opensymphony.com/>

http://www.unesco.org/cgi-bin/webworld/portal_freesoftware/cgi/page.cgi?d=1

<http://www.oss4lib.org/>

5. Why the developers are participating in open source communities?

- to learn and develop new skills;
- to share knowledge and skills;
- to “improve job opportunities”;
- derive direct income from this participation;
- derive indirect income – such as getting a job unrelated to free software thanks to their previous or current participation in free software developer communities.
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6. Libraries and Open Source

OSS products being in use in the libraries can be categorized as:

- Installation Toolkits
- Integrated Library Systems
- Collections - Repositories management systems
- Portals
- Federated searching tools
- Link Resolvers
- Office applications
- Internet tools
- Course Management Systems
- Desktop Publishing
- Graphics and Image manipulation
- Authorization/Authentication tools

In 2005, eIFL.net began developing a “Library in a Box” program to advocate for and support the use of open source software in the libraries.

Visiting Talis podcast you can read about and listen to Bess Sadler, presenting “Library-in-a-Box” project.

http://blogs.talis.com/panlibus/archives/2007/04/bess_sadler_tal.php

What library related OSS products are in use in the participants libraries/institutions?

7. How to evaluate the quality of the OSS products?

Business Readiness Rating (BRR) is being proposed as a new standard model for rating open source software.

<http://www.openbrr.org/wiki/index.php/Home>

What is workshop participants opinion about the quality of OSS products in general?

What are the assumptions and the risks of using OSS?

Workshop participants will contribute to the discussion of these topics and will assist to develop “Open-source software: pros and cons” table.

Pros	Cons

Each participant is highly welcomed to share ideas on actions for celebrating **Software Freedom Day (September 15, 2007)** in his/her organization.

Appendix.

1. The list of OSS Centres and Organisations - <http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/en/document/1631/471>
2. Open Source Case Studies - <http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/en/chapter/470>
3. European Union Public Licence (EURL v1.0) <http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/en/document/6523>
4. <http://www.code4lib.org/>
5. <http://liblime.com/>
6. <http://www.open-ils.org/>

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2. Open Source Software - definition, licensing models and organizational consequences (introduction), Reinhard Altenhöner. World Library and Information Congress: 71th IFLA General Conference and Council, 2005
3. IFLA Information Technology Section newsletter. July, 2005.
4. Why Open Source Software / Free Software (OSS/FS, FLOSS, or FOSS)? Look at the Numbers! David A. Wheeler. Available at http://www.dwheeler.com/oss_fs_why.html (accessed 28 April, 2007).
5. Study on the economic impact of open source software on innovation and the competitiveness of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) sector in the EU. Final report Prepared on November 20, 2006. Lead contractor: UNU-MERIT, the Netherlands Subcontractors: Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Spain, University of Limerick, Ireland, Society for Public Information Spaces, France, Business Innovation Centre of Alto Adige-Südtirol, Italy. Prepared by: Rishab Aiyer Ghosh, MERIT
6. <http://www.microsoft.com/windowsserver/facts/topics/tco.msp> (accessed 28 April, 2007)
7. <http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/en/document/2623/5585#migration> (accessed 28 April, 2007)